

### **Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listing of claims in the application.

Claims 1-21 are amended.

### **Listing of Claims:**

1. (Currently Amended) A process for preparing a fertilizer composition, ~~characterized in that it comprises~~ comprising the following steps:  
reacting a humified fossil material, which is selected from the group comprising leonardite, lignite, xylite and peat, in water in the presence of gluconic acid; and  
subsequently adding to the mixture an alkaline agent in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to a basic value.
2. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the quantity of gluconic acid added, expressed as gluconic acid at 50% by weight, is from 3% to 10% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material.
3. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 1 ~~or claim 2, characterized in that~~ wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide or ammonium hydroxide.
4. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 3, characterized in that~~ claim 1, wherein the alkaline agent is potassium hydroxide, added at a quantity of from 6% to 15% by weight relative to the weight of the fossil material, said quantity being expressed as potassium hydroxide at from 48-50% by weight.
5. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 4, characterized in that~~ claim 1, wherein the gluconic acid is added in such a quantity as to adjust the pH to values of less than 3 and preferably less than 2.5.
6. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 5~~ claim 1, wherein step a) is carried out at a temperature not greater than 30°C.

7. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 6~~ claim 1, wherein step a) is continued for a time of from 2 to 4 hours with agitation, which is followed by an optional stationary period for a time of from 6 to 12 hours.
8. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 7~~ claim 1, wherein, in step b), agitation is continued for a time of from 6 to 12 hours, followed by an optional stationary period of up to 24 hours.
9. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 8, characterized in that it comprises~~ claim 1, comprising the addition of macronutrient and micronutrient substances to the product of step b).
10. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9, ~~characterized in that it comprises~~ comprising the addition of urea in quantities of from 10% to 60% relative to the weight of the fossil material.
11. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 9 ~~or 10, characterized in that it comprises~~ comprising the addition of plant extracts, in particular extracts of castor beans and lupin seeds.
12. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of the preceding claims~~ claim 1, wherein the product obtained by step b) is subjected to drying and granulation in order to produce a composition in granular form.
13. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 12, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the granular composition is mixed with super-absorbent polymer substances, in particular derivatives of hydrolyzed starch, for preparing a granular composition having a high level of water retention.

14. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 9, characterized in that~~ claim 1, wherein the product of step b) is subjected to filtration with separation of the liquid phase which is intended for use as a liquid fertilizer.

15. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 14, ~~characterized in that~~ wherein the liquid phase obtained by the filtration is supplemented with urea in quantities of from 20% to 60% relative to the weight of the liquid phase.

16. (Currently Amended) A process according to ~~any one of the preceding claims, characterized in that~~ claim 1, wherein the fossil material is a leonardite ore.

17. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in liquid form, which can be obtained by means of the process according to ~~any one of the claims 1 to 11 and 14 to 16~~ claim 1.

18. (Currently Amended) Fertilizer compositions in granular form, which can be obtained by means of the process according to ~~any one of claims 1 to 13~~ claim 1.

19. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used as a fertilizer, in particular for increasing plant growth.

20. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A granular composition according to claim 18 wherein the composition is used ~~in order~~ to increase the fertility of agricultural soils or ~~in order~~ to decontaminate soils polluted by chemical products and/or toxic metal ions.

21. (Currently Amended) ~~Use of a~~ A liquid composition according to claim 17 wherein the composition is used ~~in order~~ to fertilize by localized irrigation and/or by spraying leaves.